

Ecological Métissage: Exploring the Third Space in Outdoor and Environmental Education

By Greg Lowan

An increasing number of scholars, both Indigenous¹ and non-Indigenous, are asking, “Is it possible to blend Western and Indigenous North American ecological philosophies and knowledge?” Indeed, many scholars and educators, such as the late Nakoda Chief John Snow (1977–2005), suggest that the future success of our society will require the combined wisdom of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

Eminent Tewa scholar and educator Gregory Cajete (2001) relates the story of one of his family members who has a “split head”. This family member is of mixed Euro-American and Indigenous Tewa ancestry and often feels split between the two cultures. Cajete suggests that many people in our predominantly Western society built on the Indigenous territories of Turtle Island (North America) also have a split head; our sociocultural and geographical identities are often disjointed. John Ralston Saul (2008) provides a related view when he suggests that Canadians have forgotten (or been led to forget) the foundational Aboriginal aspects of our culture and languages, resulting in an incomplete national sense of self. Cajete proposes that the ultimate task at hand is to recognize this and find ways to heal the split head of our collective society, blending the best of Western (and other) and Indigenous cultures to create a unified whole.

In response to these kinds of concerns, Métis scholar Catherine Richardson (2004, p. 16) introduces the concept of the “Third Space” as the existentially blended territory of a Métis mentality. She compares this to the “First Space” of the dominant Euro-Canadian society and the “Second Space” of colonially subjugated Aboriginal peoples. However, during a recent conference presentation, one audience member astutely pointed out to me that the First Space here on Turtle Island was, in fact, Aboriginal, followed by the European Second Space, which resulted in the Third Space of the Métis (see Figure 1, below). The Third Space is a

place where Western, Aboriginal and other cultural beliefs, philosophies, values and knowledge intersect, cohabit and intermingle (Richardson, 2004).

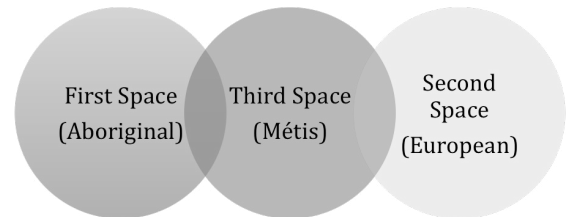
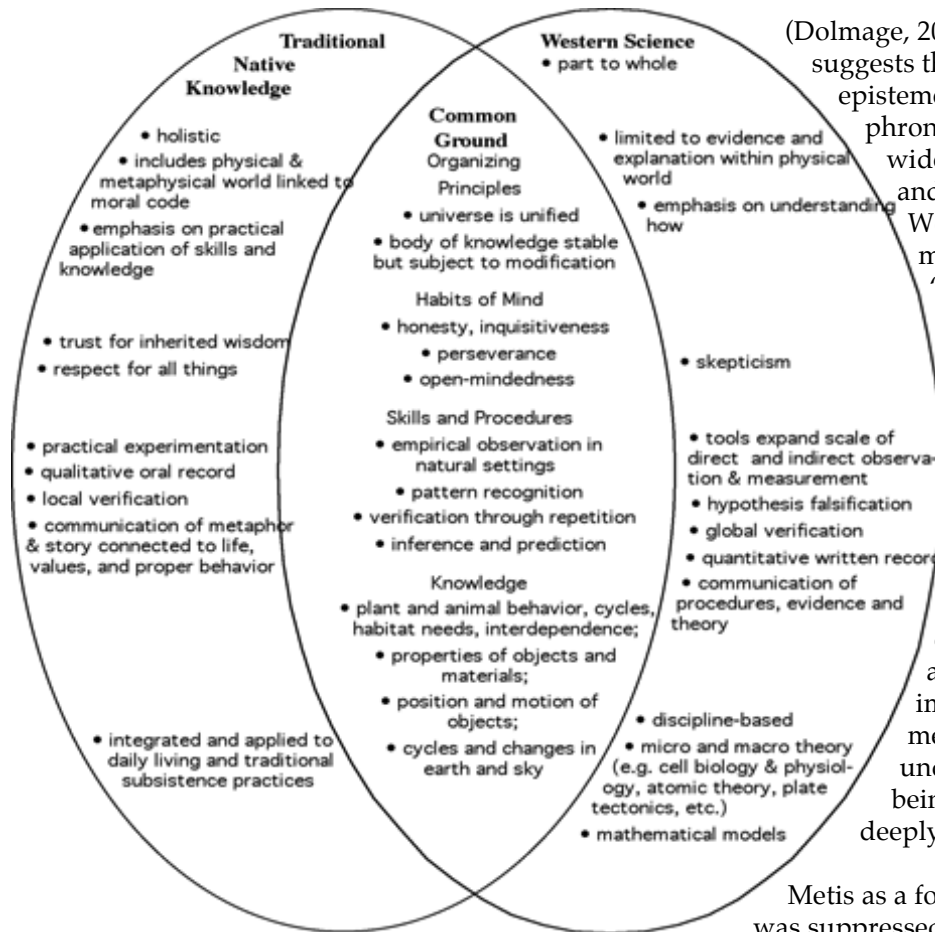


Figure 1. The Third Space.

The Third Space makes some people uncomfortable because “hybridity problematizes boundaries” (Pieterse, 2001, p. 220). Zembylas and Avraamidou (2008) propose that challenging this further opens up the Third Space. Pieterse suggests that hybridity involves recognizing the “in-betweens” and “interstices” (p. 238) and pushes us beyond false dualistic conceptions of culture and race. According to Pieterse, the Third Space requires “collective liminality, collective awareness” (p. 239) similar to the Trickster knowledge celebrated in many Indigenous cultures. Finding the Third Space involves collectively embracing a hybrid or Trickster consciousness.

Alaskan scholars Ray Barnhardt and Oscar Kawagley (2005) provide the illuminating Venn diagram below to compare and contrast Western and Indigenous approaches in search of common ground. From their diagram we can see that there are indeed many similarities between Western science and Indigenous knowledge of nature. Concepts such as a unified universe; personal qualities such as perseverance, curiosity and honesty; empirical observation of nature; and a desire to understand the behaviour and patterns of plants, animals and other natural phenomena are common to both traditions.



(Dolmage, 2009). Baumard suggests that while episteme, *techne* and *phronesis* have been widely recognized and preserved in Western history, *metis* (pronounced “meh-tiss”) was suppressed and ignored until D tienne and Vernant’s (1974, 1991) seminal efforts in its recovery. As a M tis person, I find the etymological, epistemological and ontological implications of *metis* as a way of understanding and being in the world deeply intriguing.

Metis as a form of knowledge was suppressed in Western history for various reasons. Dolmage (2009) suggests that *metis* wasn’t widely recognized for the past two thousand years because of its associations with femininity embodied in the form of the goddess Metis, one of Zeus’s wives and the mother of Athena. D tienne and Vernant (1974, 1991) also propose that *metis* has been suppressed throughout Western history because of its association with animals and nature. Examples of *metis* in Greek mythology and philosophy often involve the *dolos* (tricks or ruses) of animals like the fox, the octopus or the squid, which is able to turn itself inside out. In their concluding chapter, D tienne and Vernant (1974, 1991) suggest that

In studies of the Greeks pursued by scholars who claim to be their heirs, there has been a prolonged silence on the subject of the intelligence of cunning [*metis*]. The fundamental reasons for this have been two-fold. The first is perhaps that, from

Figure 2. Finding common ground between Western science and Indigenous knowledge (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005).

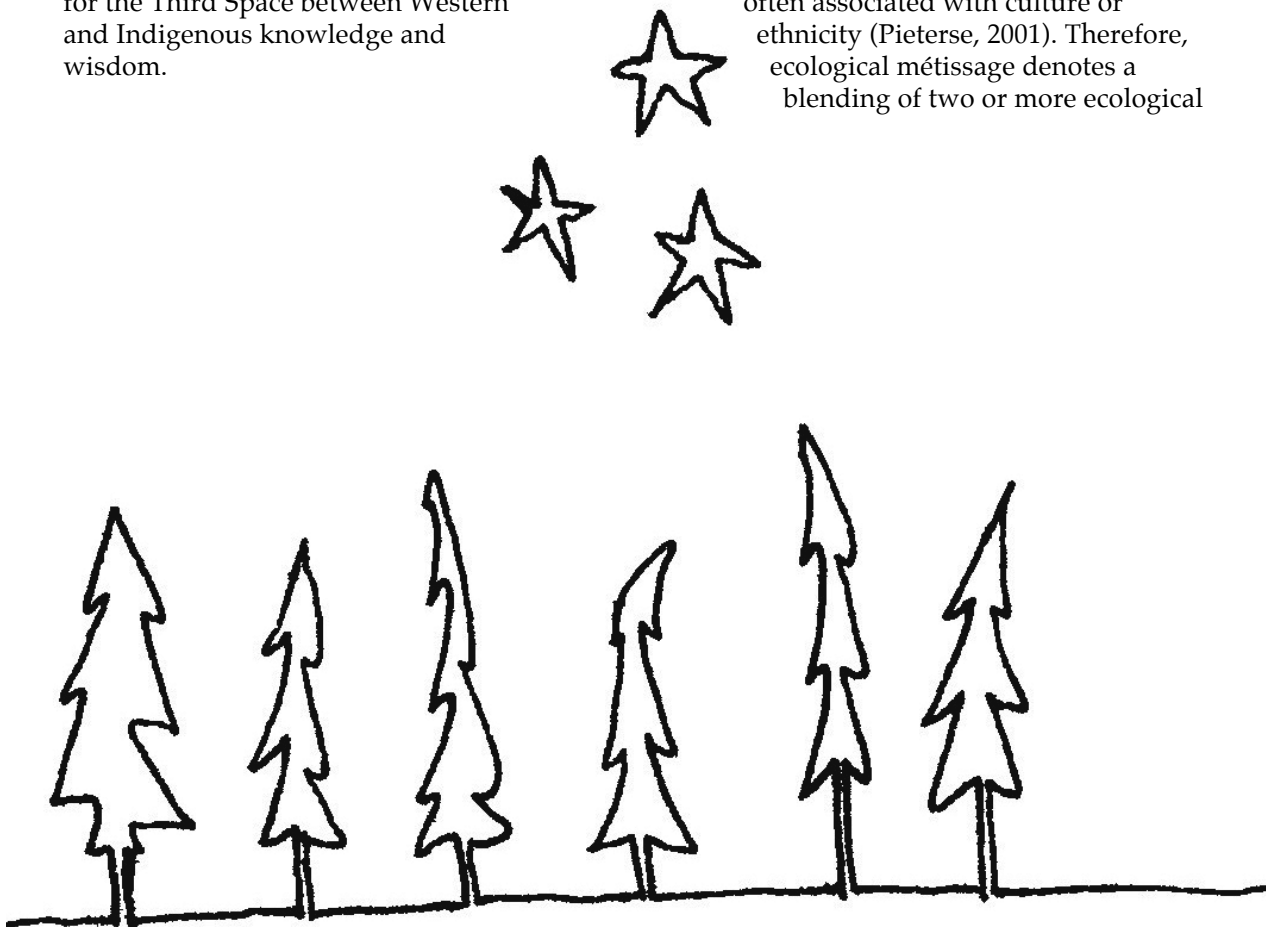
Aikenhead (2008) uses the Ancient Greek terms “episteme” and “phronesis” respectively to describe Western science and Indigenous knowledge. He defines episteme as thinking focused on how the world works and phronesis as practical *wisdom-in-action*. Baumard (1994) defines phronesis as a blend between “*techne*”, which is practical knowledge, and episteme. However, he also suggests that the Greeks actually recognized four dominant forms of knowledge: episteme (theoretical or philosophical knowledge), *techne* (practical knowledge), phronesis (theoretically informed practice) and “*metis*”ⁱⁱ (oblique or intuitive knowledge), a term etymologically related to the Latin “*mixtus*”, meaning mixed, which is the root of modern terms such as “*m tissage*”

a Christian point of view, it was inevitable that the gulf separating men from animals should be increasingly emphasized and that human reason should appear even more clearly separated from animal behaviour than it was for the ancient Greeks. The second and even more powerful reason is surely that the concept of Platonic Truth, which has overshadowed a whole area of intelligence with its own kinds of understanding, has never really ceased to haunt Western metaphysical thought. (pp. 318–319)

The oblique, intuitive and subtle boundary-crossing characteristics of *metis* as a way of knowing and being in the world could be considered as a more flexible alternative to the absolutist legacy of Platonic thought that is reflected in the single-culture nationalism of, for example, many European nations and the United States (Saul, 2008). This idea might prove illuminating in our search for the Third Space between Western and Indigenous knowledge and wisdom.

Two-Eyed Seeing—viewing the world simultaneously through both Western scientific and Aboriginal lenses to form a focused and unified vision—is another theory developed by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall (Lefort and Marshall, 2009). A recent issue of *Green Teacher* (Fall, 2009) focused on the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing. Several educational programs that strive to embody Two-Eyed Seeing were profiled and will be discussed later in this article.

Concepts such as the Third Space, healing the split head, Two-Eyed Seeing and *metis* provide a compelling theoretical basis for exploring intercultural environmental ethics and education. I use the term “ecological *métissage*” to collectively describe these concepts. The concept of ecological *métissage* arises from Thomashow's (1996) description of “ecological identity” as the way that we understand ourselves in relation to the natural world and an understanding of “*métissage*” as a mixing or blending often associated with culture or ethnicity (Pieterse, 2001). Therefore, ecological *métissage* denotes a blending of two or more ecological



world views in personal identity, philosophy and practice. The following explores examples of ecological *métissage* in practice.

Ecological *Métissage* in Practice: Intercultural Outdoor and Environmental Education in Canada

Intercultural outdoor and environmental education is a growing field of practice with a limited but growing body of literature. Many organizations across Canada and around the world are currently delivering programs designed to bridge cultures. While some programs aim to share Indigenous knowledge with Indigenous students only, others are open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Other programs also attempt to blend Indigenous knowledge with modern scientific approaches, seeking the previously discussed Third Space. The following is a brief review of a selection of programs and key scholars in these areas. One study that I first encountered during my master's research (Lowan, 2008, 2009) was Takano's (2005) description of a community-developed land-based cultural education program based in Igloodik, Nunavut. Takano, a researcher of Japanese descent, participated in Paariaqtuqtut, a 400 kilometre journey through the community's ancestral territory in May 2002. Paariaqtuqtut means "meeting on the trail" in Inuktitut and was developed by a group of community members and Elders. Paariaqtuqtut aims to connect young people with cultural skills and teachings in a land-based context. Takano (2005) found that community members in Igloodik were concerned that many youth were losing connections with their land and culture. Those interviewed observed that this leads to youth feeling lost between two worlds, disconnected from their community and culture, yet unprepared to live in the Western world. Takano also recorded the experiences of several participants who felt that Paariaqtuqtut had helped them to reconnect with their land and culture.

David Lertzman (2002) and Thom Henley (1989) provide descriptions of the Rediscovery program. Rediscovery programs have been founded across North America

and around the world in various forms. Some are very small and focused on one particular Aboriginal community while others, such as Ghost River Rediscovery (Lertzman, 2002) in Calgary, are large, year-round programs. Ghost River Rediscovery is based on local Indigenous traditions and welcomes students of all ages from all cultural backgrounds. I have had the wonderful opportunity to volunteer with them on several occasions. Henley (1989), one the program's original founders, states, "Rediscovery brings together people from many different racial backgrounds When people from different races have the opportunity to talk to one another, to work and play together, then inevitably they begin to learn about each other's lives and cultures" (p. 35).

As previously mentioned, a recent issue of *Green Teacher* (Fall, 2009) focused on Mik'maq Elder Albert Marshall's concept of Two-Eyed Seeing. Several programs embodying Two-Eyed Seeing were profiled. For example, Hatcher and Bartlett from Cape Breton University's Integrative Science program (2009a, 2009b; Bartlett, 2009) describe units that they developed on various subjects, such as birds, traditional medicine and astronomy, for high school students. In their units they attempt to integrate Western science with Mi'kmaq knowledge and philosophies of nature. They recognize that truly blending Western and Indigenous approaches is a challenging task for educators.

Further examples of inspiring Two-Eyed Seeing programs are provided in the same issue of *Green Teacher*. Métis educators Deanna Kazina and Natalie Swayze (2009) relate their experiences with "Bridging the Gap", an inner-city program in Winnipeg that works with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Bridging the Gap strives to integrate Western and Aboriginal approaches to learning about the natural world. Based on their description and another article by Swayze (2009) in the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, it appears that they are experiencing success. Kazina and Swayze instill genuine cultural awareness in their students through lessons such as

how to offer tobacco and how to respectfully approach the Elders who are a strong part of their program.

Gloria Snively (2009) also relates her experiences as a long-time teacher-educator at the University of Victoria interested in what she calls “cross-cultural science”. She uses a lesson on dentalium, a shell traditionally used as money by Indigenous people across North America, as a vehicle for discussing Two-Eyed Seeing. Snively observes:

Cross-cultural science education is not merely throwing in an Aboriginal story, putting together a diorama of Aboriginal fishing methods, or even acknowledging the contributions Aboriginal peoples have made to medicine. Most importantly, cross-cultural science education is not anti-Western science. Its purpose is not to silence voices, but to give voice to cultures not usually heard and to recognize and celebrate all ideas and contributions. It is as concerned with how we teach as with what we teach. (p. 38)

While there is a growing body of literature on intercultural outdoor and environmental education in Canada, no comprehensive studies to date have focused on the experiences and competencies of intercultural outdoor and environmental educators and the deeper societal implications of their work. Who are these “border crossers” (Hones, 1999; Nguyen, 2005; Pieterse, 2001)? What led them to their chosen vocation? What makes them effective? And how might they be reshaping Canadian ecological identity? Why is this important? These are the kinds of questions that I am currently addressing in interviews with contemporary intercultural outdoor and environmental educators as part of my doctoral research.

ⁱ Cultural terms, such as Indigenous, Aboriginal, Western, and Elder, have been intentionally capitalized as a sign of respect.

ⁱⁱ In this article “Métis” refers to Métis people, while “Metis” will be understood as a figure from Greek mythology, with “metis” denoting a recognized form of knowledge in ancient Greek society.

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This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Killam Trust and the University of Calgary.